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STATE FOR SCA/A (MBRADLEY), PM/WRA (SHARRIS, DHADRICK)

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SUBJECT: GOA PREPARING FOR GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR MINE ACTION

¶1. The MFA hosted an annual conference on humanitarian mine action (HMA) April 25 in Kabul, inviting key donors to a meeting to discuss current Afghan HMA issues and the broader international/Afghan community to a USG (STATE/PM/WRA) sponsored dinner to mark International Mine Action Awareness Day. Donor representatives present included: the United States, the EU, Japan, Canada, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany, as well as the United Nations Mine Action (UNMACA). (Note: The Canadian rep announced that Canada had just pledged 20 million Canadian dollars to mine action in Afghanistan. End Note) During remarks at the donor meeting and subsequent dinner, FM Spanta and other MFA officials emphasized that the GOA wants to begin an incremental transition toward assuming Afghan lead responsibility from UNMACA for mine efforts in Afghanistan. Spanta said that the GOA is drafting legislation for a Mine Action Basic Law which will establish the framework for the GOA to assume lead responsibility for demining activities in Afghanistan. (Note: MFA officials reported that the draft has not yet been submitted to the Cabinet for approval. They expressed confidence the legislation would be passed fairly "soon" but were not yet able to provide an estimated time-line. End Note) Spanta stressed the need for continued support from international donors in the face of anticipated declining budgets for mine action.

¶2. Deputy Finance Minister Shirani addressed the conference and urged donors to contribute funds directly to the GOA core budget. However, he said the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), managed by the World Bank, offered another mechanism for donations and that donors could earmark additional funds specifically for mine action. In this context, he emphasized that, given existing ARTF commitments and projections, it would be "very difficult" to fund mine action from ARTF without additional contributions to the fund specifically for that purpose.

¶3. United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Director Max Gaylard highlighted Afghanistan's international contribution to demining through participation of Afghan demining experts in different programs around the world. However, he said that "much remains to be done in Afghanistan," and "time is short," given Afghanistan's international commitment to clear all known mine fields by 2013. Gaylard argued that another factor increasing the urgency for mine action in Afghanistan is that donor interest will wane, as other major problems (e.g., HIV, malaria) compete for their interest and support. Thus, Afghanistan needs to make the most of the resources that it receives for demining. In that context he underlined that UNMACA would be working with Afghan and international partners to achieve greater efficiency in demining in

Afghanistan. To that end, Gaylard said UNMACA's plans for FY 1386 would include the introduction of new methodologies, placing more Afghans in senior positions at UNMACA, and introducing more mechanical equipment to demining operations in Afghanistan.

¶4. At the MFA-hosted, UNMACA-organized dinner to mark International Mine Action Awareness Day, the MFA warmly praised the United States for sponsoring the event, and an Afghan demining manager working for UNMACA gave a moving presentation on the importance of humanitarian mine action to the future of Afghanistan.

NORLAND